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CHINESE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1948-55

A STUDY IN
GOVERNMENT POLICY



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL INTERCHANGE POLICY

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The Committee on Educational Interchange Policy was established by the Institute of International Education in 1954 in response to a recommendation made by an independent committee which studied the role and functions of the Institute. This group noted the need for a policy committee to survey the field of exchange, and recommended that the Institute create such a body. The Committee has been assigned responsibility for helping to:

1. Clarify the values of exchanges; set standards and provide objectives for exchange activities.
2. Identify problems and difficulties, find solutions.
3. Identify promising programs and bring them to the attention of interested groups.

Although established by the Institute, the Committee's responsibility is to study and report upon the whole area of exchange of persons, and not only those activities to which IIE itself is related. The Committee is served by a small secretariat in the Institute.

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In Geneva, on May 26, 1954, a spokesman of the Chinese Communist Government publicly charged that the United States was "forcibly retaining . . . many" of some 5,000 Chinese students contrary to "the principles of international law and humanitarianism." Distorted though it was, this statement for the first time focused world-wide public attention on the problem of the Chinese students in the United States.

As early as 1948, funds of the Economic Cooperation Administration had been set aside for the use of needy Chinese students stranded in the United States. During the following seven years, emergency Congressional appropriations of over ten million dollars were authorized to enable Chinese students and scholars to achieve a meaningful educational objective after which they could either return to their homeland or, upon authorization of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, accept employment in the United States to support themselves until a time feasible and desirable for them to return to China. Of the approximately 1,300 Chinese students who left this country, the travel expenses of about 930 were financed in whole or in part by the U.S. Government; 791 of these benefited from the special emergency aid program under the U.S. Department of State.

Approximately 150 Chinese, whose technical skills might

have aided the Communists, were temporarily detained after 1951. From the summer of 1955, when the detention orders were lifted, however, through the end of last year, only 39 of those detained actually chose to leave the United States.

The full story of the ten million dollar emergency aid program undertaken by the U.S. Government to provide financial assistance to more than 3,600 Chinese students and scholars in this country has never been widely known. These Chinese, made refugees when their government was forced from the Asian mainland, provide a story that is truly unique in the history of international relations. It is the purpose of this paper to outline the facts of this unusual chapter in the operations of an international educational exchange program.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Over a hundred years ago the first Chinese student came to the United States. During the next century, nearly 20,000 Chinese traveled to the United States to study. Stimulated initially by American missionaries, about thirty students a year came in the 1870's when an official Chinese educational mission was established in this country. At the turn of the century, after China's defeat in 1895 by a Westernized Japan, young Chinese intellectuals turned toward Europe and America for knowledge of the modern world. By 1910, nearly 10,000 Chinese students were reported to be studying outside Asia, though there were then scarcely 400 in the United States.

The number of America-bound students was to increase, however, partly as a result of the initiation of an education program financed from the unexpended balance of the Boxer Indemnity Fund. In 1908, Congress had authorized the return to China of almost fifteen million dollars which remained in the Indemnity Fund after all private claims had been settled. The Chinese Government agreed to the United States suggestion that the money be used in part to educate

Chinese students in America. A steady flow of Chinese students to this country was encouraged and the number in the United States during the years 1919 to 1939 ranged from 728 to 1,561 with an annual average of well over 1,000.

Though the total dropped during the Second World War, it rose sharply in the immediate post-war period when the Chinese Government initiated a large-scale program of officially-sponsored study abroad. By the 1948-49 academic year nearly 4,000 Chinese students were enrolled in American colleges and universities, the largest group of foreign students except for Canadians.

CHINESE STUDENTS IN 1949

In 1948 and 1949, during the advance of the Chinese Communist armies, most of the Chinese students in the United States found themselves cut off from all sources of financial support. By mid-1949 some 2,200 students were reported as urgently needing assistance. Of 234 students in the Boston area, 97 were declared to be in "acute distress;" at the University of California, 60 out of 91 were so described. Chinese professors and scholars at American universities faced increasing difficulties as the large college enrollment of the immediate post-war years declined somewhat, and teaching staffs were reduced.

The immediate burden resulting from the plight of the Chinese students fell largely upon the colleges and universities at which they were enrolled. Scholarship funds were made available to the stranded Chinese, tuition payments were postponed and emergency loans were granted. Religious and civic organizations gave generously and local businessmen extended credit. The Chinese Embassy in Washington offered such financial assistance as it could from its rapidly declining dollar funds. None of these efforts was adequate, however, to meet the pressing and constantly growing need.

GOVERNMENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

United States Government aid to stranded Chinese students began in 1948. In that year the Department of State, through the Office of Education, allocated some \$8,000 for distribution to a scattering of needy students through the Institute of International Education and the China Institute in America. In the next seven years, nearly 1,000 times that amount, or some eight million dollars, was spent by the State Department alone, in addition to much private assistance, to aid 3,517 Chinese students and 119 Chinese scholars and professors.

The Government moved gradually into this newly developing field of federal responsibility. The first large-scale allocation of funds came in April 1949, at the request of the Chinese Government, through transfer of \$500,000 to the Department of State from the aid-to-China program of the Economic Cooperation Administration. In October of that year, as part of the Foreign Aid Appropriation Act of 1950 (Public Law 327), an additional four million dollars was made available by Congress from funds previously appropriated for aid to China. In June 1950, a further six million dollars was provided under the China Area Aid Act of 1950 (Public Law 535), again from unspent but previously appropriated funds. Like the original half-million dollars, the two congressional appropriations were allocated for administration by the Division of Exchange of Persons in the Department of State. As of June 30, 1955, the program was closed and the unused balance reverted to other government programs.

Financial aid to students under the program was limited to tuition and maintenance adequate to achieve an immediate educational objective, plus emergency medical treatment and, upon request, the cost of return travel to China. For scholars (who did not become eligible for assistance until 1950) the limitations were less rigid, although work towards completion of some scholarly project was required.

The largest number of Chinese students received assistance in 1950-51 and, as the following table indicates, the number of grantees declined rapidly thereafter.

TABLE 1

TOTAL NUMBER OF GRANTEES WHO HAVE RECEIVED AID,
BY FISCAL YEARS

	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953	1954	1955*
Chinese students . . .	266	2,400	2,817	1,254	506	175	46
Chinese scholars	—	—	77	134	67	25	10
Total	266	2,400	2,894	1,388	573	200	56

* First half of 1955.

The total amount spent during this period of six and a half fiscal years amounted to approximately eight million dollars, as follows:

TABLE 2

TOTAL AMOUNT OBLIGATED THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 1954

To aid Chinese students	\$6,924,239
To aid Chinese scholars	744,909
For medical assistance	31,815
For administrative purposes	309,043
Total	\$8,010,006

ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHINESE STUDENT EMERGENCY AID
PROGRAM

In response to urgent requests from American college and university personnel and community groups, the Chinese Student Emergency Aid Program came into being to provide assistance for individuals who were in great need.

In July 1949, a Congressional report stated that:

The immediate purpose of this legislation is a humanitarian one—to provide urgently needed financial assistance to Chinese students in the United States. From the stand-

point of the long-range foreign policy of the United States, however, there is an equally compelling reason for assisting these men and women. These students have had an opportunity to observe and experience the democratic way of life. Thus, because of the traditional position of scholar-leadership in Chinese society, they are in a unique position to exert a profound influence on the future course of their country. There is no question but that it is in the interest of the United States to assist these individuals who can play such a vital role in shaping China's future.*

In administering the aid program, the State Department relied heavily on the cooperation of educational institutions. An important role was played by the Advisory Committee on Emergency Aid to Chinese Students established in 1949 by the Secretary of State. Of its seven members, three came directly from university campuses and the other four represented related private organizations: the American Council on Education; the China Institute in America; the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers; and the Institute of International Education. In the early development of the program, the Advisory Committee met frequently, and later about once a year. Throughout the program, the Department worked closely with this advisory body in developing the standards under which the program operated.

In all, 572 U.S. educational institutions participated in the program through appointed representatives. From the very beginning, campus authorities assumed the major burden of recommending applications and distributing funds, a procedure which kept State Department administrative costs to a minimum. In many institutions the conducting of investigations and the writing of reports involved a considerable investment of time and money. Government aid was welcome both as a means of aiding the stranded Chinese students, and of relieving some of the strain on the institution's own resources.

* House of Representatives, Report No. 1039, "Relief of Chinese Students," July 13, 1949, p. 2.

Eligibility

To qualify for financial aid, the individual Chinese student had to be:

- (a) a citizen of China as evidenced by a passport or other identifying document
- (b) in financial need as certified by his official campus representative and his references
- (c) enrolled in an institution of higher learning especially approved by the Secretary of State
- (d) in good standing and working full time for an academic degree and
- (e) in the United States before January 1, 1950

Under the initial \$500,000 transferred from ECA, assistance had been restricted to seniors and graduate students in certain technical and scientific fields whose training was considered as being within the scope of the ECA China aid program. Each recipient was required to sign a pledge that upon completion of his education he would return to China and make his knowledge and skills available in his country's service. This condition of the grant was discontinued when the loss of the mainland to the Communists made return no longer feasible.

Duration of Assistance

Guided by the House Foreign Affairs Committee's statement that "this is not a program for relief to be extended into an incalculable future," the State Department made the achievement of a "suitable educational objective" the criterion for the termination of assistance and defined an educational objective as the acquisition of the degree for which the student was working at the time he entered the program. For one, this might mean full tuition and maintenance for almost four years; for another it might mean only the cost of typing a Ph.D. thesis. Only in a few special instances was a student recommended for continued government assistance

after he had received his first degree. In accordance with this criterion the program was brought to a logical and orderly conclusion in June 1955.

Amount of Aid

An equally important principle of the government's program was that aid must be *supplemental* to the student's other sources of financial support. Each student was required to file a financial statement with his authorized campus representative, who in turn recommended to the Department the amount to be given. A top limit for maintenance was set, based on the Bureau of Labor Statistics cost-of-living figures. No student received more than \$115 per month for living expenses plus tuition and fees, and this only while actually carrying on his approved academic program.

Permission to Work

The total cost of the program was cut by allowing the Chinese students to earn part of their expenses. Although foreign students are normally restricted in the privilege of working while in the United States, Congress, in an amendment to the China Area Aid Act of 1950, "authorized and directed" the Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization to promulgate a general regulation permitting Chinese students to take jobs for as long as they remained in the country, even after the completion of their studies.

For students, summer jobs and part-time campus jobs were not hard to find; for graduates, the search for employment was somewhat more difficult. Those with scientific and technical training were most easily placed, although security regulations in defense industries raised occasional obstacles. Special categories of persons, such as doctors, found that state licensing requirements, applicable to all foreigners and persons trained abroad, barred them from practice. Those who encountered the greatest difficulty in finding positions in

their fields were the graduates in the humanities and the social sciences, although roughly fifty percent were successful.

Finding employment for the Chinese was not a responsibility of the U.S. Government and the burden fell most heavily on private organizations, many of which had already given generous financial support to the students. Under the auspices of the China Institute in America, with the assistance of the National Council of Churches, a central placement service was established in New York, with branches in California and Boston, which made 1,562 placements from mid-1951 to the end of 1955 and gave helpful vocational advice to many others. During this period, the China Institute conducted over 4,000 employment interviews. Records indicate that the demand for these placement services has continued at a high level, with some decrease evident in the last six months of 1955. Local committees of the Chinese Student and Alumni Services, supported largely by the United Board for Christian Colleges in China, also helped place graduates.

A survey of the employment situation was made by the Department of State in 1953. Covering 1,097 of the students who had been aided under the program, it revealed that 361 were then employed. Of the remaining 736, 362 were still in school, and 141 had returned to China, died, or were otherwise accounted for. The status of the balance of those surveyed was unknown. Classifying jobs in three categories: (1) "clearly in line with the grantee's academic interests;" (2) "not directly in line with the grantee's training, but either in an allied field or offering financial security sufficient to justify a change of field;" and (3) "not considered adequate;" the study showed the following:

	Technical Students	Non-technical Students
Employed within field of training.....	161	106
Employed outside field of training.....	9	78
Employment not adequate.....	2	5

Another study, in 1953-54, of 228 former students employed in the New York area revealed that 83% of the technical students were working in the fields for which they were trained, and that 43% of the non-technical students were similarly employed.

Although many unquestionably are dissatisfied with their employment, the conclusions of the closest observers are that, as a result of much effort, the over-all problem of employment for Chinese students is less acute than it was previously. Over 600 former students and scholars now hold teaching posts in American universities.

Detention of Certain Chinese: 1951-55

No issue relating to Chinese in the United States has been subject to more confusion and widespread publicity, both in the United States and abroad, than the several problems surrounding the temporary detention of certain Chinese nationals in this country. What is seldom realized is the fact that some of these men and women were never students under the State Department emergency aid program, although a number had been enrolled in United States universities and colleges at some point during a very lengthy period of stay.

Following the presidential proclamation of a state of national emergency in late 1950 very few Chinese had both a publicly stated, as well as a personal, desire to return to China. Through 1950-51 the Immigration Service of the Department of Justice, acting under legislation relating to national emergencies, issued about 150 orders temporarily preventing the departure of certain Chinese. Such detention was limited to individuals who had skills which would have been of use to the Chinese Communist regime, whose forces had attacked the United Nations armies in Korea.

The removal from the S.S. President Cleveland in Honolulu of nine Chinese en route to the Far East in September 1951 was the most dramatic of the personal incidents which

received wide attention in the press in the United States and throughout the world. Unfortunately, such "front page" incidents involving Chinese received the banner headlines while the financial, occupational, educational and medical assistance that was provided to thousands of persons went almost unnoticed in the world's press.

While the detention orders were in effect, however, 314 Chinese without highly technical skills left the country. In the summer of 1954, the detention orders were gradually lifted and by late summer of 1955 the last had been rescinded.

Of the relative handful who did seek to return to the mainland and who were barred by the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Americans most closely associated with the program have estimated that by no means all really wanted to go through the "Bamboo Curtain." Some, in effect, were seeking a form of insurance against Communist pressure. By trying to depart and being restrained, they could at once appease the Communists and remain in the United States. It is now apparent that the restrictions were not opposed by many of those detained. They remain in the United States today and as late as the close of 1955 only 39 had exercised their privilege to leave the United States after the restraining orders were lifted.

Although the Department of State and the Immigration Service occasionally found themselves working at cross-purposes in handling the cases of Chinese detained in the United States, it should be understood that the Department was operating under legislation enacted to assist students in completing their education, whereas the Immigration Service was enforcing complex immigration statutes brought into effect by the proclamation of national emergency and which were applicable to all aliens. Much of the seeming inconsistency in the treatment of Chinese was attributable to the impact of the Korean hostilities, to I&NS regulations which frequently required technical arrest and orders of deportation

in order to get the machinery of appeal and official stay under way, and to the decentralization of I&NS procedures which gave regional officers a large measure of individual discretion resulting in varying interpretations of the same regulations.

The Communist charges at the Geneva conference in 1954 emphasized the urgent need for a definite resolution of the problem of Chinese in the United States. During the August-September 1955 negotiations, the United States was reluctant to allow a third party to investigate the status of those Chinese because it feared that once identified the Chinese in question might be subject to retaliatory action, and because it could not permit the Communists to replace the Chinese Nationalist Embassy as the only representative of China entitled to claim the allegiance of Chinese nationals in the United States. It was, however, agreed on September 10 to make the Government of India a channel through which a Chinese, on his own initiative, might seek assistance if he believed he was obstructed in leaving the United States to return to the mainland of China. The Embassy of India in Washington has announced that it is prepared to entertain any requests for such assistance but has not revealed whether any Chinese have in fact applied. However, the State Department announced on December 16, 1955, that the Indian Embassy had made no representation that any Chinese was being prevented from leaving.

THE SITUATION TODAY

Nearly seven years have passed since the U.S. Government undertook responsibility for the education of this substantial group of Chinese refugees. How shall we judge the actions of the U.S. Government toward the Chinese students who found themselves refugees and stranded on American shores? A generous nation has given substantial financial support and educational assistance to thousands of destitute students, offered them transportation to their homes and provided

them with the opportunity to earn a living. Many would argue that humanitarian values alone justified a program of this scope and that it created a deeper understanding of democratic values. In this broad sense a humanitarian approach can be profoundly political.

It is all the more unfortunate, therefore, that the full story of America's response to the Chinese student emergency has been so little known and that, instead, the detention of a few score specialists and the occasional mishandling of individual cases were widely publicized in the press of the United States and in other countries.

Those who know the record very largely agree that the arrangements for administering the emergency aid program worked remarkably well. Perhaps this was due in part to the freedom which Congress and the emergency aid legislation gave the State Department in administering the program. More important, it would appear, was the large measure of decentralization which permitted the maximum degree of individual adjustment under relatively few but fundamental standards. In addition the wholehearted participation of colleges and universities in the program, and the steady assistance of private organizations, produced a high level of cooperative effort.

In retrospect, certainly, both humanitarian and national interests were well served by our national policy towards Chinese students in the United States in the difficult years from 1948 to 1955.

For many of these refugees, however, there remains the perplexing problem of finding satisfactory employment; for others the almost insoluble task of bringing their families from China. For almost all who remain, a satisfactory adjustment of their immigration status is a paramount preoccupation. For some it may be possible to shift to permanent residence status under provisions of the Refugee Relief Act of 1953; others, by marriage to Americans or by private legislation, may achieve a preferential status as quota immigrants.

But many, unless Congress enacts further legislation (and some is now pending), may find themselves in a sort of legal limbo for years, technically subject to deportation because their student visas have long since expired, but, as long as China remains Communist, never to be forced to return.



Other statements in this series by the Committee on Educational Interchange Policy:

The Goals of Student Exchange. An analysis of goals of programs for foreign students. January 1955.

Geographic Distribution in Exchange Programs. A study of geographic considerations in the selection and placement of U.S. Government-sponsored exchange students. January 1956.

Copies are available through the Institute of International Education, 1 East 67th Street, New York 21, New York.



